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## Christian Aramaism: The Birth and Growth of Aramaic Scholarship in the Sixteenth Century

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*Seeking Out  
the Wisdom of the Ancients*

Essays Offered to Honor  
Michael V. Fox  
on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday

*Edited by*

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# *Christian Aramaism: The Birth and Growth of Aramaic Scholarship in the Sixteenth Century*

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Since the mid-nineteenth century, Jewish historians have marveled at the vigorous growth and vitality of Christian Hebrew scholarship in early modern Europe. Ludwig Geiger and Moritz Steinschneider chronicled parts of this astonishing and unexpected phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> During the past 50 years, Karlheinz Burmeister, R. Gerald Hobbs, Bernard Roussel, Gerard Well, and Jerome Friedman have provided biographies and analyses of the achievements of some of the most important Christian and Jewish scholars who made this possible.<sup>2</sup> In my own research I have sought to quantify the growth of Hebrew learning among Christians through analyzing the Christian Hebrew printing industry as it developed. To honor my teacher Michael V. Fox, however, I wish to write, not on Christian Hebraism, but on the growth of Aramaic learning among Christians during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> The Christian study of Aramaic literature illustrates even more sharply than Christian Hebraism the religious and philological barriers that hindered the study of Jewish literature by non-Jews and the often-surprising ways that these barriers were surmounted.<sup>4</sup>

1. Ludwig Geiger, *Das Studium der Hebräischen Sprache in Deutschland vom Ende des XV bis zur Mitte des XVII Jahrhunderts* (Breslau: Schletter'sche Buchhandlung, 1870); and Moritz Steinschneider, *Christliche Hebräisten: Nachrichten über mehr als 400 Gelehrte, welche über nachbiblisches Hebräisch geschrieben haben* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1973).

2. Stephen G. Burnett, "Christian Hebrew Printing in the Sixteenth Century: Printers, Humanism, and the Impact of the Reformation," *Helmantica* 51/154 (April 2000) 13–42.

3. I will not discuss developments in the study of either Biblical Aramaic, which has always been taught with Biblical Hebrew, or Syriac, which was encouraged primarily by contact with eastern Christians rather than Jews. See Werner Strothmann, *Anfänge der Syrischen Studien* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1971).

4. I chose this topic, in part, because postbiblical Aramaic was the most difficult class that I had with Michael. I hope that my most-recent foray into Aramaic scholarship will please him more.

Postbiblical Aramaic literature was forbidding to the would-be Christian reader for a number of reasons. First, it was fundamentally Jewish literature. Christians could justify the study of Biblical Hebrew and the Hebrew Bible text because the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) was a part of their own biblical canon. Biblical humanists and theologians, Protestant and Catholics alike, could point to St. Jerome, Nicholas of Lyra, Paul of Burgos, and other predecessors in the Christian study of Hebrew. Jewish Aramaic literature, however, included the Targums, the Talmud, and the Zohar, all of which had been written by Jews for Jews after the close of the New Testament canon. Assuming Christian scholars could overcome the religious barrier, very few of them were able to overcome the lack of Latin-language Aramaic grammars and lexicons and the rarity of the texts themselves. While the patronage of secular or church officials could and did enable Christian Aramaists to make impressive strides, the assistance of Jewish converts and professing *Jews* was essential for the growth of this new field. By 1600, Aramaic study had found a home within the world of Christian learning, as attested both by the number of Aramaic-related titles printed and also by the Aramaic library holdings of both individual scholars and universities.

Why should Christians devote time to reading Jewish Aramaic books? During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, such Christian Aramaic learning as existed was largely devoted to anti-Jewish polemics or proselytizing. The Christians scholars who pursued it, many of them Jewish converts, combed the Talmud, kabbalistic literature, and the Targums for passages that appeared to support Christian doctrines and perspectives.<sup>5</sup> The theological need to use Jewish Aramaic texts for Christian polemics was sufficient motivation for a few scholars to devote themselves to the study of Aramaic, but only a few. Only when Christian scholars came to believe that these texts could benefit Christian theology and academic life in a constructive way by providing information useful to Christians would Aramaic literature find a larger niche within the Christian world of learning.<sup>6</sup>

5. Gershom Scholem, "Beginnings of Christian Kabbalah," in *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and Their Christian Interpreters* (ed. Joseph Dan; Cambridge: Harvard College Library, 1997) 27–30; David Ruderman, "Italian Renaissance and Jewish Thought," in *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, vol. 1: *Humanism in Italy* (ed. Albert Rabil Jr.; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988) 395–96; and Jeremy Cohen, *Friars and the Jews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) 131–56.

6. The prime example of a book that Christian scholars came to accept as useful for their purposes was Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed*. See Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 382–83.

For Christian scholars, finding a satisfactory motive for studying Aramaic literature was simpler for some genres than for others. By the late fifteenth century, the Christian case for Targumic study had long been clear. Not only had polemicists such as Raymundo Marti found the Targums useful, but so had biblical commentators. Nicholas of Lyra, for example, discovered that the Targums contained much information that Christian exegetes could use, not only to refute Jewish interpretations of passages, but also to bolster Christian ones.<sup>7</sup>

While other Christian scholars, some of them Jewish converts, had put kabbalistic literature to use in the cause of Christian missionizing by the early fifteenth century, it was Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) who first saw another, quite different benefit for kabbalistic study. He believed and taught that "non-biblical Jewish sources were meaningful and relevant to Christianity itself."<sup>8</sup> Pico's *own* understanding of Kabbalah was shaped both through the Latin translations of the sources and through his own Platonic and Pythagorean philosophical framework. Although Pico himself did not read the Zohar, either in translation or in the original, he justified its study by Christians.<sup>9</sup>

The most difficult Aramaic book to justify for Christian study was the Talmud. Through the work of Peter the Venerable of Cluny (1094–1156), the idea that the Talmud was a "heretical" work had entered Christian theological tradition. The earlier medieval theological understanding of Judaism (and the predominant one throughout the Middle Ages) was that Jews had functioned as witnesses to the truth of Christianity by continuing to live according to the laws of the Pentateuch, serving as "living letters" of the biblical text. Jeremy Cohen has argued that Peter and other later theologians believed that the Talmud was "heretical" because it represented a new law whose authority among Jews was greater than that of the Bible. Peter also understood the Talmud to be "sinister, insane, blasphemous, diabolical Jewish doctrine."<sup>10</sup> Christian authorities justified Talmud-burnings in the fourteenth century because the work contained "blasphemies, errors, curses, and lies."<sup>11</sup> Yet, despite the Talmud's

7. Frans van Liere, "The Literal Sense of the Books of Samuel and Kings: From Andrew of St Victor to Nicholas of Lyra," in *Nicholas of Lyra: The Senses of Scripture* (ed. Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith; Studies in the History of Christian Thought 90; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 77–81.

8. Joseph Dan, "The Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin and Its Historical Significance," in *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and Their Christian Interpreters* (ed. Joseph Dan; Cambridge: Harvard College Library, 1997) 56.

9. Chaim Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 20–21, 187.

10. Cohen, *Living Letters*, 260–64.

11. *Ibid.*, 330.

evil reputation -within Christian scholarship, by the early sixteenth century even Talmudic study could be justified on humanist grounds.

Johannes Reuchlin is best known as the author of the first Latin-language Hebrew grammar and for his devotion to the Kabbalah. But Reuchlin also was the author of an *Opinion about the Books of the Jews* written for the imperial commission that was summoned to study Pfefferkorn's proposal to confiscate Jewish books.<sup>12</sup> When he discussed the Talmud, Reuchlin asserted that it contained information valuable to the most important university-level disciplines (that is, theology, law, and medicine). He wrote:

For it contains many good medical prescriptions and information about plants and roots, as well as good legal verdicts collected from all over the world by experienced Jews. And in theology the Talmud offers in many passages arguments against the wrong faith. This can be seen from the bishop of Burgos's books concerning the Bible, which he has -written in a praiseworthy and Christian manner and in the *Scrutinium Scripturarum*, in which he clearly protects our faith on the basis of the Talmud.

Indeed, Reuchlin found no fewer than 50 passages in which Paul of Burgos quoted Talmudic passages in the latter book.<sup>13</sup> Reuchlin's argument was less important for its immediate effect on imperial policy than as an important legal opinion and precedent that established a rationale for allowing Christians to use—and to print—the Talmud. The two opinions submitted by the theology faculty of Basel and Ambrosius Froben to defend the propriety of printing the Basel Talmud in late 1578 or early 1579 reflect and note Reuchlin's arguments.<sup>14</sup>

Around 1635, Johannes Buxtorf the Younger wrote a letter with advice on how to begin the study of postbiblical Aramaic. The student, he wrote, must first attain a good knowledge of Aramaic dialects, consult a variety of study aids, and above all, purchase any Latin translations of these books, because by comparing the original text with the Latin, the student would be able to make rapid progress.<sup>15</sup> In the days of Pico and Reuchlin, almost none of these tools was

12. The original opinion was submitted on October 6, 1510, and was subsequently printed with annotations in Reuchlin's *book Augenspiegel* (Tübingen, 1511), as a part of his pamphlet war *with* Pfefferkorn. Erika Rummel, *The Case against Johann Reuchlin: Religious and Social Controversy in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) 88.

13. *Ibid.*, 92.

14. Stephen G. Burnett, "The Regulation of Hebrew Printing in Germany, 1555-1630: Confessional Politics and the Limits of Jewish Toleration," in *Infinite Boundaries: Order, Disorder, and Reorder in Early Modern German Culture* (ed. M. Reinhart and T. R<sup>^</sup>obisheaux; Kirksville, Mo: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1998) 339-40.

15. Peter T. van Rooden, *Theology, Biblical Scholarship and Rabbinical Studies in the Seventeenth Century: Constantijn L'Empereur (1591-1648), Professor of Hebrew and Theology at Leiden*

available to Christians. The creation of a philological apparatus of Aramaic grammars, dictionaries, and bilingual text editions (some with annotations) was one of the greatest achievements of sixteenth-century Christian Aramaists.

The very first Aramaic grammar composed in Latin for Christian students was written by Sebastian Miinster, a professor at the University of Heidelberg, and was printed in 1527. Miinster learned Hebrew from Conrad Pellican, his superior in the Franciscan order, and Matthaeus Adrianus, a Jewish convert from Spain who taught a number of the most important Protestant Hebraists of the early sixteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Most of his Aramaic education, however, involved personal study, with occasional help from professing Jews.<sup>17</sup> Miinster's grammar was intended to help students learn not only Aramaic but also enough medieval Hebrew (including abbreviations) to read Jewish biblical commentaries.

Miinster's pioneering grammatical work would find few emulators, at least during the sixteenth century. Only seven authors composed Aramaic grammars. Four of these were at least nominally Catholic (Theseus Ambrosius, George Amira, Angel Caninius, and Jean Mercier), and three were Protestant (Sebastian Miinster, Cornelius Bertram, and Immanuel Tremellius). Two of these authors, Amira and Ambrosius, lived and worked in Italy, while the other four lived and worked in the French-speaking world. Both Caninius and Mercier taught Hebrew at the College Royale of the University of Paris, the former during the 1550s, and the latter from 1547 to 1570, while Bertram was one of Mercier's students. Bertram taught Hebrew at the Academy of Geneva from 1567 to 1586, and Tremellius taught Hebrew at the University of Heidelberg from 1561 to 1575, though like Bertram he had his grammar printed in Geneva. Mercier and his colleagues at the College Royale played a critical role in providing both grammatical helps and annotated Aramaic texts for other would-be Aramaic scholars.

(trans. J. C. Grayson; Studies in the History of Leiden University 6; Leiden: Brill, 1989) 119.

16. Stephen G. Burnett, "Reassessing the 'Basel-Wittenberg Conflict': Dimensions of the Reformation-Era Discussion of Hebrew Scholarship," in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (ed. Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) 183.

17. According to Prijs, Miinster's usual way of indicating Jewish help in his works was to use the formula *a docto quodam Iudaeo* (Miinster, *Chaldaica Grammatica*, f. a3r; Joseph Prijs, *Die Easier Hebrädischen Drucke (1492-1866)* [ed. Bernhard Prijs; Olten and Freiburg i. Br.: Urs Graf, 1964] 43). Self-study was frequently the only way for Christians to learn Hebrew in the early sixteenth century. See Karl Heinz Burmeister, "Johannes Campensis und Sebastian Miinster: Ihre Stellung in der Geschichte der Hebräischen Sprachstudien," *ETL* 46 (1970) 443-47.

Providing serviceable Aramaic lexicons for Christian students proved to be a far greater challenge than grammars. Apart from the Hebrew-Aramaic dictionary of Alfonso de Zamora in vol. 6 of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible (1514–17), all scholarly attempts to write an Aramaic dictionary would be based to some degree on Nathan ben YehieFs *Sefer Aruk* (ca. 1100).<sup>18</sup> Nathan ben Yehiel wrote his lexicon for advanced students of the Talmud, the Targums, and the Midrash and focused his attention on explaining foreign and difficult words while leaving out more common ones. Moreover, he did not organize his dictionary according to the principle of trilateral roots (which he either did not accept or was perhaps unaware of) but used an alphabetical order.<sup>19</sup> While some Christian Hebraists had the ability to use *Sefer Arukas* it was written, most needed a much smaller, Latin summary of it.

Jewish author Elias Levita wrote the first Aramaic dictionary specifically intended for Christian readers at the request of his patron, Cardinal Viterbo. Viterbo may have learned the rudiments of Hebrew as early as his stay in Florence during 1497, and throughout his career he was keenly interested in kabbalistic learning and the Targums, as well as in oriental studies generally.<sup>20</sup> He hired Elias Levita to serve as his personal tutor in Hebrew and Aramaic from 1515 until 1527. At Viterbo's initiative Levita took on the unenviable task of compiling the first Targumic dictionary, combing through Nathan ben Yehiel's *Sefer Aruk* for information, and providing further references to Latin and Greek loanwords in the Targums. Levita organized his work alphabetically and used the trilateral root as his organizing principle.<sup>21</sup> Levita was forced to leave Rome and move to Venice because of the sack of Rome in 1527, but Viterbo provided further financial support for Levita, which allowed him to complete the dictionary between 1528 and 1530. Levita's work, entitled *Meturgaman*, or "Interpreter," was finally printed by Paul Fagius in Isny during 1541.<sup>22</sup>

In 1523, Santes Pagninus wrote *Enchiridion expositionis vocabulorum Haruch*, the first Aramaic dictionary actually to appear in print. Pagninus learned Hebrew in Florence from Clemente Abraham, a Spanish-Jewish convert.<sup>23</sup> He

18. Zamora, *Vocabularium Hebraicum*, in *Biblio Polyglotta*, vol. 6, f. ir-clxxii r.

19. Shimeon Brisman, *History and Guide to Judaic Dictionaries and Concordances* (vol. 3/1; Hpboken, NJ.: KTAV, 2000) 16.

20. Francis X. Martin, *Friar, Reformer and Renaissance Scholar: Life and Work of Giles of Viterbo 1469-1532* (The Augustinian Series 18; Villanova, Pa.: Augustinian Press) 163.

21. Ibid., 169-71; and Gerard E. Weil, *Elie Levita Humaniste et Massorete (1469-1549)* (Studia Post-Biblica 7; Leiden: Brill, 1963) 116.

22. Ibid., 115-17. On the philological character of the work, see pp. 271-79.

23. Santiago Garcia-Jalon de la Lama, *Lagramdtica hebrea en Europa en el siglo XVI. Guia de lectura de las obras impresas* (Salamanca: Publicaciones Universidad Pontifica, 1998) 115.



served as a professor of Hebrew in Rome while Leo X was pope, enjoying his patronage and the patronage of three of his successors. Pagninus based his dictionary, not on *Sefer Aruk* directly, but on a Jewish summary, the *Sefer Aruk ha-Qizzur*.<sup>24</sup> Pagninus's work was reprinted twice in expanded form, once in the sixth volume of the Antwerp Polyglot (1568—72), edited by Guy le Fevre de la Boderie, and as the *Thesaurus Linguae Sanctae sive Lexicon hebraicum* with annotations by Jean Mercier, Cornelius Bertram and Pierre Chevalier, printed in Lyons, 1575 and reprinted in 1577.

Sebastian Miinster also wrote an Aramaic dictionary, which he had printed in 1527, the same year as his grammar. He based his work on both a manuscript copy of the *Sefer Aruk ha-Qizzur*, which he found in a Dominican monastery library in Regensburg, and upon Pagninus's *Enchiridion*.<sup>25</sup> His old teacher, Pellican, also gave him his notes on Talmudic vocabulary to include in the dictionary.<sup>26</sup> David de Pomis, a Jewish physician, composed the final Postbiblical Hebrew/Aramaic dictionary for Christians that appeared in the sixteenth century. His *Zemah David* (Venice, 1587) was also based on the *Sefer Aruk* and provided glosses in Italian as well as Latin.

While Latin-language Aramaic grammars and dictionaries were essential for Christian students to learn the language, translations of Aramaic texts were an important aid to study as well. Because the Targums were valuable to Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran theologians alike, and both the Zohar and Talmud had far fewer Christian readers, it is no surprise that only targumic texts were published in Latin translation during the sixteenth century. But these translated Targums appeared in two distinctly different kinds of publications, polyglot Bibles and small annotated editions, usually of single books for use as textbooks.

The earliest Targum to appear in a Christian printing with Latin translation was published as part of Agostino Giustiniani's *Psalterium hebraeum, graecum, arabicum et chaldaicum* (Genoa, 1516). Giustiniani provided not only the targumic text of the Psalms but also a Latin translation. The patronage of Cardinal Sauli was essential for the printing of this pioneering work, and Sauli's arrest in 1517 (as well as the poor sales of the Psalter), frustrated Giustiniani's ambition

24. Samuel Krauss provided an extensive evaluation of one manuscript of the *Aruk ha-Qizzur*, which had been owned by Italian Jewish grammarian Abraham de Balmes (1440-1523), in "Aruch ms. Breslau," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 73 (1929) 385-402, 451-65.

25. Joseph Perles, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Hebräischen und Aramäischen Studien* (Munich: Thjeodor Ackermann, 1884) 20-30.

26. Karl Heinz Burmeister, *Sebastian Münster: Versuch eines biographischen Gesamtbildes* (Basler Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft 91; Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1963) 47.

to continue the project until he had published an entire polyglot Bible.<sup>27</sup> The two best-known polyglots, the Complutensian polyglot (1514–17) and the Antwerp Polyglot (1568–73), were successfully completed because of their more secure patronage and funding.

The Complutensian Polyglot was the brainchild of Cardinal Jimenez de Cisneros. Cardinal Jimenez assembled a first-class team of scholars to prepare the text of the polyglot Bible, including two Jewish converts, Pablo Coronel and Alfonso de Zamora. The editors provided *Targum Onkelos* in Aramaic and a facing Latin translation. Cardinal Jimenez spent about 50,000 gold ducats on preparing the text for printing. As Giustiniani had done with his *Psalterium*, Cardinal Jimenez dedicated the polyglot Bible to Pope Leo X. Unfortunately, the distribution of the Bible went far less smoothly than its printing. Although production of the polyglot was completed by 1517, its distribution was not sanctioned until papal authorization was given in March of 1520. Of the 600 sets printed, many were lost in a shipwreck.<sup>28</sup> It was a handsome, monumental Bible printing, whose size and distribution troubles limited its influence.

The Antwerp Polyglot Bible was meant both to update and to surpass the older Complutensian Polyglot Bible. It was edited and produced under far different circumstances, however, from its predecessor's. While its publication was justified primarily on the basis of its usefulness to the Catholic Church and the luster that it would add to the reputation of King Philip II of Spain, it was also intended to be a philological weapon of war against Protestantism.<sup>29</sup> In contrast to the older Complutensian Polyglot, the Antwerp Bible contained Targums to nearly every book of the Hebrew Bible, with facing Latin translation by Benito Arias Montano, the editor-in-chief himself.<sup>30</sup> It also featured an Aramaic dictionary and brief grammatical sketch written by Guy le Fevre de la Boderie, one of Guillaume Postel's best students from the University of Paris.

27. R. Gerald Hobbs, "Agostino Giustiniani of Genoa," in *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation 2* (ed. Peter G. Bietenholz and Thomas B. Deutscher; 3 vols.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985-87) 2.102-3. In 1517, Cardinal Sauli plotted with several other high-churchmen against Pope Leo X, and his arrest on May 19, 1517 effectively ended his career in the church hierarchy. See D. S. Chambers, "Bandinello Sauli, of Genoa," in *Contemporaries of Erasmus*, 3.198–99.

28. Erika Pummel, *Jimenez de Cisneros: On the Threshold of Spain's Golden Age* (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 212; Renaissance Masters 3; Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999) 58-65.

29. Leon Voet, *The Golden Compasses: A History and Evaluation of the Printing and Publishing Activities of the Officina Plantiniana at Antwerp* (2 vols.; Amsterdam: Vangendt, 1972) 1:63.

30. B. Rekers, *Benito Arias Montano (1527-1598)* (Studies of the Warburg Institute 33; London: The Warburg Institute / Leiden: Brill, 1972) 48.

Volume 8 also included Franz Raphelengius's collation of variant readings in the Targums.<sup>31</sup> King Philip II provided an initial subsidy of 12,000 guilders to underwrite the costs, which ultimately would grow to 21,000 guilders.<sup>32</sup>

The final Polyglot Bible to appear in the sixteenth century was the work, not of a group of well-connected Catholic scholars, but of an extraordinarily persuasive Lutheran, Elias Hutter.<sup>33</sup> Hutter can probably best be understood as an educational visionary and entrepreneur. In 1597, when he arrived in Nuremberg, Hutter planned to found a school for languages and sought the support of the city council to publish multilingual books, a monumental multilingual dictionary, a New Testament edition in twelve languages, and then his enormous Hexateuch printing in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, German, Slavonic, French, and Italian. To finance the printing of these complicated works, Hutter borrowed an enormous amount of money from the city council, 14,000 Gulden for the Hexateuch alone in 1600.<sup>34</sup> Sales of Hutter's books were too slow to repay his loans to the city council, and Hutter was forced first to turn over his remaining stock of books in 1604 and then to leave town in early 1605, never to return.<sup>35</sup> His polyglot Hexateuch would be only an odd footnote in Targum studies, except that the Nuremberg city council was desperate to recoup some of their losses. They used several different strategies to sell off the remainder of Hutter's stock, and these books were fairly easy to find on the book market.<sup>36</sup>

The generosity of wealthy or powerful patrons was only one factor in the circulation of Aramaic texts. The foundation of chairs of Hebrew in northern European universities meant that the potential existed for regular Aramaic classes and therefore textbook sales. Jean Cinqarbres and Jean Mercier, both professors of Hebrew at the College Royale of Paris were among the first to print Aramaic readers for their students.<sup>37</sup> Between 1550 and 1562, Mercier

31. Ibid., 53.

32. Voet, *The Golden Compasses*, 1:61, 63 n. 2.

33. Another Lutheran scholar, Johannes Draconites, also published selections from Genesis Psalms, and Isaiah and the complete books of Proverbs, Joel, Micah, Zechariah, and Malachi in a polyglot format that included Targums. The books were printed individually in Wittenberg and Leipzig between 1563 and 1565 (Johannes Schilling, "Johannes Drachs Marburger Gedenkrede auf Martin Luther," in *Dona Melancthoniana: Festgabefür Heinz Scheible zum 70. Geburtstag* [ed. Johanna Loehr; Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Fromman-Holzboog, 2001] 391-93).

34. Lore Sporhan-Krempel and Theodor Wohnhaas, "Elias Hutter in Nurnberg und seine Biblia in etliche Sprachen," *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 27 (1986) 158-59.

35. Ibid., 160.

36. Ibid., 161.

37. The first to do so was Paul Fagius, who published a translation of *Targum Onqelos* in Strasbourg, 1546. B. J. Chard R. aubenheimer, *Paul Fagius aus Rheinzabern: Sein Leben und Wirken*

prepared seven different student editions of books of the Targum, mostly the Minor Prophets but also the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. His colleague, Jean Cinqarbres, printed another three Aramaic readers with the texts of Lamentations (1549) and Hosea (1554-56).<sup>38</sup> Other Targums for biblical books were published by Erasmus O. Schrekenfuchs (Song of Solomon, Basel, 1553), Pierre Costus (Ecclesiastes, Lyons, 1554); Gilbert Genebrard (Joel, Paris, 1563), and Arnauld Pontac (Obadiah, Jonah, Zechariah, Paris, 1566). Immanuel Tremellius published a Latin translation, without the Aramaic text, of the twelve Minor Prophets (Heidelberg, 1567).

Although neither the Zohar nor the Talmud was published in Latin translation, either in part or in their entirety, during the sixteenth century, they were objects of enthusiastic study by at least some Christian scholars.<sup>39</sup> Among Christian students of the Zohar, Guillaume Postel stands out, because he translated the entire work into Latin and prepared it for publication. Postel first acquired a manuscript copy of the Zohar in Venice during 1547, and he began his first translation of it the following year. In addition to his considerable linguistic skills, Postel brought to the task of translation his idiosyncratic understanding of a universal salvation, which he derived from the Zohar as interpreted by the "Venetian Virgin," Mother Johanna, his spiritual mentor.<sup>40</sup> After the Zohar appeared in print for the first time (Cremona, 1558-59), Postel acquired a copy of it and translated the Zohar a second time into Latin.<sup>41</sup> He tried unsuccessfully a number of times between 1553 and 1580 to convince various Basel printers to print his Zohar translation.<sup>42</sup>

*als Reformator und Gelehrter* (Veröffentlichungen des Vereins für Pfälzische Kirchengeschichte 6; Grünstadt [Pfalz]: Emil Sommer, 1957) 62-65.

38. Sophie Kessler Mesguiche, "L'enseignement de Fhebreu et de Faraméen a Paris (1530-1560) d'après les oeuvres grammaticales des lecteurs royaux," in *Les origines du Collège de France (1500-1560)* (ed. Marc Fumaroli; Paris: Collège de France/Klincksieck, 1998) 366-70.

39. For literature on sixteenth-century Christian Kabbalism, see François Secret, *Les Kabbalistes Chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Paris: Dunod, 1964); Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalistes Chrétiens* (Cahiers de FHermetisme; Paris: Albin Michel, 1979). See also Giulio Bust, "Francesco Zorzi: A Methodological Dreamer," in *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and Their Christian Interpreters* (ed. Joseph Dan; Cambridge: Harvard College Library, 1997) 102 and 120 n. 26.

40. Marion L. Kuntz, *Guillaume Postel: Prophet of the Restitution of All Things. His Life and Thought* (International Archives of the History of Ideas 98; The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981) 83-84.

41. *Ibid.*, 137.

42. *Ibid.*, 138. See also Carlos Gilly, *Spanien und die Basler Buchdruck bis 1600: Ein Querschnitt durch die spanische Geistesgeschichte aus der Sicht einer europäischen Buchdruckerstadt* (Basler Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft 151; Frankfurt/Main: Helbing / Basel: Lichtenhahn, 1985) 77-78.

Talmudic study was by far the most difficult branch of Aramaic literature that a Christian could pursue. During the sixteenth century (and also the seventeenth), Christian students normally needed a Jewish tutor to make any progress at all. Wolfgang Capito owned a Talmud, but he gave it to Conrad Pellican in Zurich in 1526 because he had no tutor to help him learn. Pellican would ultimately make substantial use of Capito's gift. From 1538 to 1540, Pellican had the help of Michael Adam, a Jewish convert, as he translated portions of the Talmud into Latin. At first the work went very slowly, because Adam knew no Latin and also could not read German. The two men spent half an hour a day reading Talmud, Adam explaining a given passage in German, while Pellican wrote down the Latin translation.<sup>43</sup> Ultimately Pellican, with Adam's help, translated 17 tractates, drawn from both the Babylonian and the Palestinian Talmuds, all of which remained unpublished. Pellican's motive for devoting decades to the work, however, was apologetic rather than humanistic. He wrote to a colleague in 1550, "Why should anyone devote themselves to these Jewish unworthy things? Only to prevent the Jews, who alone master it, from creating confusion among Christians." Pellican believed that combing Jewish literature for valuable information and insights was like "looking for gemstones in heaps of manure."<sup>44</sup> Christian scholars did not begin to make serious use of the Talmud as a historical source for understanding the Bible until the early seventeenth century, when Johannes Coccejus and Constantijn L'Empereur began their careers.<sup>45</sup>

Apart from Pellican's motive of "knowing one's enemy," another use for Talmudic learning among Christians was preparing censors to read Jewish books. While the majority of Hebrew censors in Italy were Jewish converts, there were a few both in Italy and in Germany who were non-Jews. In order to gain the knowledge necessary to evaluate the Talmud at all, these Christian censors had to have instruction from Jews or Jewish converts. For example, three different men censored portions of the Basel Talmud between 1578 and 1580: Immanuel Tremellius, a Jewish convert; his former student from the University of Heidelberg, Pierre Chevalier; and Marius Marinus, the papal inquisitor of Venice. Marinus had first learned Hebrew from Pablo Veneto, a Jewish convert and a fellow Augustinian monk in the Congregation of S. Salvator of Brescia. Later Marinus would receive further instruction from Samuel Archevoiti in Venice at the same time that young Leon Modena studied with him.<sup>46</sup>

43. Christoph Zuricher, *Konrad Pellikans Wirken in Zurich, 1526-1556* (Zürcher Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte 4; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975) 169-74.

44. Ibid., 190-91.

45. Van Rooden, *Theology, Biblical Scholarship, and Rabbinic Studies*, 119-30, 179-82.

46. Fausto Parente, "The Index, The Holy Office, The Condemnation of the Talmud and Publication of Clement VIII's Index," in *Church, Censorship and Culture in Early Modern*

By the 1560s, the basic philological tools for Aramaic study had been forged, and a workable rationale for studying the Targums, the Zohar, and the Talmud had been worked out. But how widespread was the study of Aramaic among sixteenth-century Christians? Was it the hobby of a very few or a more-established, intellectual pursuit? That Aramaic study was no mere hobby is clear from an analysis of the places in which Christian Aramaic books were produced and from an examination of the records of Christian libraries in which Jewish Aramaic books found a home.

While knowledge of Biblical Hebrew was not uncommon among Christian theologians of the sixteenth century, they were seldom proficient in postbiblical Aramaic. A comparison of printing statistics for Hebrew and Aramaic philological books written for Christians suggests different markets for each kind of book. Over the course of the century, 852 philological books on Hebrew-related topics were printed for Christians, while only 61 were printed that contained substantial information on Aramaic. Of the books that were produced, only three of the authors, Elias Levita, Sanies Pagninus, and Jean Mercier had their works reprinted, which implies a lack of demand for the titles.

Because the demand for Aramaic books was not particularly high, patronage was essential for both the scholars who wrote them and for the printers who produced them. Some of the very earliest scholars were beholden to generous benefactors of many kinds. Elias Levita lived for more than a decade in the household of Egidio de Viterbo and was strongly encouraged not only to provide language instruction but also to publish in the fields of Hebrew and Aramaic studies. Both Agostino Giustiniani and Santes Pagninus also enjoyed the patronage of high Catholic churchmen, in Pagninus's case the support of no fewer than four popes. Cardinal Jimenez and Agostino Giustiniani both dedicated their works to Pope Leo X. David de Pomis dedicated his *Zemach David* to Pope Sixtus V. The monumental polyglot Bibles would not have appeared in print at all without the help of generous patrons, a cardinal and a king, who helped to defray their production costs.

Before we conclude that Christian Aramaism was an oddity, the pursuit of devoted hobbyists, we should remember that the true harvest in terms of Christian translation and study of these Jewish classics could only come after the dogged scholarship of Johannes Buxtorf the Elder and Younger produced the monumental *Lexicon Chaldaicum Talmudicum et Rabbinicum* (1639–40). Yet between the days of Miinster, Pagninus, and Buxtorf there were a sufficient number of Christians interested in Aramaic that a measurable number of Jewish Aramaic books began to form part of their libraries.

Inventories of *two* university and seven private libraries, dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, provide remarkable insights into the progress of Aramaic studies among Christians.<sup>47</sup> All of the scholars, except Joseph Scaliger, were German, as were the university library catalogs. Five of the seven libraries owned by individual scholars contained complete Babylonian Talmuds, and three also contained Palestinian Talmuds, while Reuchlin had only a manuscript copy of *b. Sanhedrin*. The Strasbourg University Library owned both Talmuds. Lucas Edenberger, Wittenberg University's librarian, tried to purchase a Talmud in Venice during 1541 but was deterred by its high cost.<sup>48</sup> In 1593, Johannes Piscator, the rector of the newly founded Herborn Academy, solicited the gift of a Babylonian Talmud from Count Wilhelm Ludwig, *Stadholder* of the Dutch province of Friesland and oldest son of Count Johann VI of Nassau-Dillenberg, for the library.<sup>49</sup> These library lists and the wishes of Edenberger and Piscator to acquire Talmuds for their institutions all underscore its importance for Christian thinkers by 1600.

The Targums are represented in every one of these lists in a wide variety of formats. The *Biblia rabbinica*, printed in Venice by Daniel Bomberg, was strongly represented. Only Georg Siegel did not own one. Martin Bucer, Conrad Pellican, and Sebastian Münster each owned two different printings, as did the Strasbourg library. Several leading Wittenberg scholars including Melancthon, Caspar Cruciger, and possibly even Luther himself also owned copies of either the 1517 or 1524-25 editions of the *Biblia rabbinica*.<sup>50</sup> Each library has at least one other Targum text, whether in the form of a Pentateuch with Targum (Strasbourg, Reuchlin, Scaliger), a polyglot Bible (Pappus), or Giustiniani's *Psalterium* (Wittenberg, Bucer, Pellican, Pappus, Scaliger).

The Zohar appears in only one copy in the library of Joseph Scaliger. However, it is worth remembering that kabbalistic study of any kind among Protestants and Catholics tended to be a private rather than a public or academic

47. The libraries' catalogs under discussion are the university libraries of Wittenberg (1540) and Strasbourg (1572?), and the scholarly libraries of Johannes Reuchlin, Martin Bucer, Sebastian Münster, Konrad Pellican, Georg Siegel, Johannes Pappus, and Joseph Scaliger. See the appendix (pp. 434-36).

48. Ernest Schwiebert, "Remnants of a Reformation Library," *Library Quarterly* 10 (1940) 525.

49. Stephen G. Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1364-1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) 6.

50. Idem, "Reassessing the 'Basel-Wittenberg Conflict,'" 187. The indistinct notation in Paul Fagius's will, written in 1549, of a "Magna biblia cum commentarijs hebraicis" from Venice should probably also be understood as a Bomberg *Biblia rabbinica* (E. S. Leedham-Green, *Books in Cambridge Inventories: Book-Lists from Vice-Chancellor's Court Probate Inventories in the Tudor and Stuart Periods* [2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986] 1:109).

pursuit. The number of Christian imprints of kabbalistic texts of any kind during the sixteenth century was very small, only 9 of the 912 Hebraica books.<sup>51</sup> Even among Jews the Zohar was not widely available until after it appeared for the first time in print in Cremona in 1558—59. Guillaume Postel, Francesco Zorzi (both living in Italy), and other Christian Kabbalists were able to find copies of the Zohar to read before it appeared in print, but its diffusion and study among Christian Hebraists was slower than the Talmud or the Targums.<sup>52</sup>

These reflections on the Aramaic holdings of a group of predominantly German Protestant Hebraists illustrate one other trend in Aramaic scholarship. These books, which were sponsored and produced in Catholic Europe, found avid readers among Protestants. Because of its large number of universities with professors of Hebrew, Germany formed one of the largest markets for Hebrew textbooks, reference books, and for source collections such as the *Biblia rabbinica*.<sup>53</sup> In the seventeenth century, Protestant scholars would take the lead in Aramaic scholarship, but even before this happened they were avid consumers of it.

Christian Aramaism, then, was born in late-fifteenth-century Italy and Spain and grew up north of the Alps during the early years of the Reformation. In its early stages it was influenced more by patronage and Jewish assistance than by the tensions of the Reformation. By the end of the sixteenth century, Christian scholars had formulated rationales for studying Jewish literature and had forged a rudimentary apparatus. They had begun the process of translating and excerpting it, especially portions of the Targums, to integrate the information they found into a Christian framework. Taken together, the growth of Christian Aramaism was a remarkable scholarly achievement.

### *Appendix:*

#### *Aramaic Books of Sixteenth-Century Libraries*

##### I. University Libraries

Wittenberg University Library, 1540<sup>54</sup>

*Biblia rabbinica* (Bomberg, 1524—25)

Giustiniani, Agostino, *Psalterium* (Genoa, 1516)

Münster, *Dictionarium Chaldaicum* (2 copies)

51. Burnett, "Christian Hebrew Printing," 21.

52. Bust, "Francesco Zorzi," 102.

53. Burnett, "Christian Hebrew Printing," 32-34.

54. Sachiko Kusakawa, *A Wittenberg University Library Catalogue of 1336* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995) 1-3.



Minister, *Grammaticum Chaldaicum*  
 Strasbourg University Library, [1572?]<sup>55</sup>  
 Pentateuchus cum Targume corn: R. Sal & R. Chiskum  
 Biblia in 2 tomis cum Targum & Peruschim R. Sal: & Abenezrae  
 Biblia in 2 tomis cum Targum & Com R. D. K. Perisol, Rav Venaki  
 Levita, *Meturgeman*  
 Aruch autore R. Nathan Bar Jehiel  
 Thalmud Ierusalymitanum tribus tomis  
 Thalmud Babylonieum quinque tomis

## II. Scholars' Libraries

Reuchlin, Johann (1455-1522)<sup>56</sup>  
*B. Sanhedrin* (MS)  
*Biblia rabbinica* (Bomberg, 1517)  
 Pentateuch with *Tg. Onqelos* (Bologna, 1482)  
 Prophets of *Targum Jonathan* (MS)  
 Bucer, Martin (1491—1551) [R. Gerald Hobbs, personal communication]  
*Biblia rabbinica* (1517)  
*Biblia rabbinica* (1524-25)  
 Giustiniani, Agostino. *Psalterium* (Genoa, 1516; quotations from it)  
 Miinster, Sebastian (1488-1552) [Burmeister, *Munster*, 200-201]  
 Babylonian Talmud  
*Biblia rabbinica* (1517)  
*Biblia rabbinica* (1524-25)  
 Pagninus, *Enchiridion*  
 PeUican, Konrad (1478-1556) [Zuricher, *Konrad Pellikans Wirken*, 231-36]  
 Babylonian Talmud  
 Palestinian Talmud  
*Biblia rabbinica* (1524-25)  
*Biblia rabbinica* (1548)  
 Giustiniani, Agostino. *Psalterium* (Genoa, 1516)  
 Siegel, Georg (donated to Altdorf UB in 1598) [Eriangen UB MS 2436,  
 ft. 81r-83v] Theology Professor at the University of Altdorf  
 Basel Talmud

55. Johannes Pappus wrote the catalog in the flyleaves of his copy of *Meturgemann: Lexicon Chaldaicum Authore Eliia Levita* (Isny: Fagius, 1541), Wolfenbiittel, HAB Sig. 205.1 Th. 2o (2). Professor Adam Shear of the University of Pittsburgh discovered this manuscript catalog and kindly informed me of it.

56. Karl Christ, *Die Bibliothek Reuchlins in Pforzheim* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1924; repr., Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1968) 36-51.

- Hutter, *Biblia Sacra, Ebraice, Chaldaice, Graece Targum Chaldaicum*
- Pappus, Johannes (1549-1610) [Herzog August Bibliothek, MS 42 Aug. 20]  
 Taught Hebrew at Strasbourg University, 1569—75  
 Antwerp Polyglot  
 Babylonian Talmud (Basel)  
*Bibliarabbinnica*
- Ambrosius, *Introductio in Linguam Chaldaicam Syriacam et Armenicam* & etc.
- Bertram, *Grammaticae Hebraicae et Aramaicae comparatio*
- Giustiniani, Agostino, *Psalterium* (Genoa, 1516)
- Hutter, *Biblia Sacra, Ebraice, Chaldaice, Graece*
- Levita, *Meturgeman* (Isny, 1541)
- Miinster, *Dictionarium Chaldaicum*
- Miinster, *Grammatica Chaldaica*
- Pagninus, *Thesaurus Lingua Hebraica* opera Joh. Merceri (Lyons: Vincentium, 1575)
- Schreckenfuchs, *Cantica canticorum et Ecclesiastes Salomonis paraphrasticos* [1553]  
*Thargum Onckeli*, Jonathan ben Uzielis et Hierosolymitanum (in fol)
- Tremellius, *Grammatica Chaldaea et Syra*
- Scaliger, Joseph Juste (1540-1609)<sup>57</sup>  
 Professor at Leiden University  
 Babylonian Talmud  
 Jerusalem Talmud (MS)  
*Biblia rabbinica* (Bomberg, 1524-25)  
 Pentateuch with Targum and Commentries of Rashi and Rambam (?)  
 Pentateuch with *Targum Onkelos*
- Ambrosius, *Introductio*
- Caninius, Angel, *Institutiones linguae Syriacae Assyriacae atque Talmudicae*
- Giustiniani, Agostino, *Psalterium* (Genoa, 1516)
- Levita, *Meturgeman*
- Mercier, *Tabulae in Chaldaeam grammaticen* (Paris)
- Mercier (ed.), *Chaldaea interpretatio sex prophetarum Hoseae, Joelis, Amos &-etc.* (1559)
- Pomis, David de, *Dictionarium*
- Zora [Zohar] (Cremona)

57. *Catalogus Bibliothecae Publicae Lugduno-Batavae* (Leiden: Elsevir, 1636) 159—63.